

PARTRIDGE TIRES

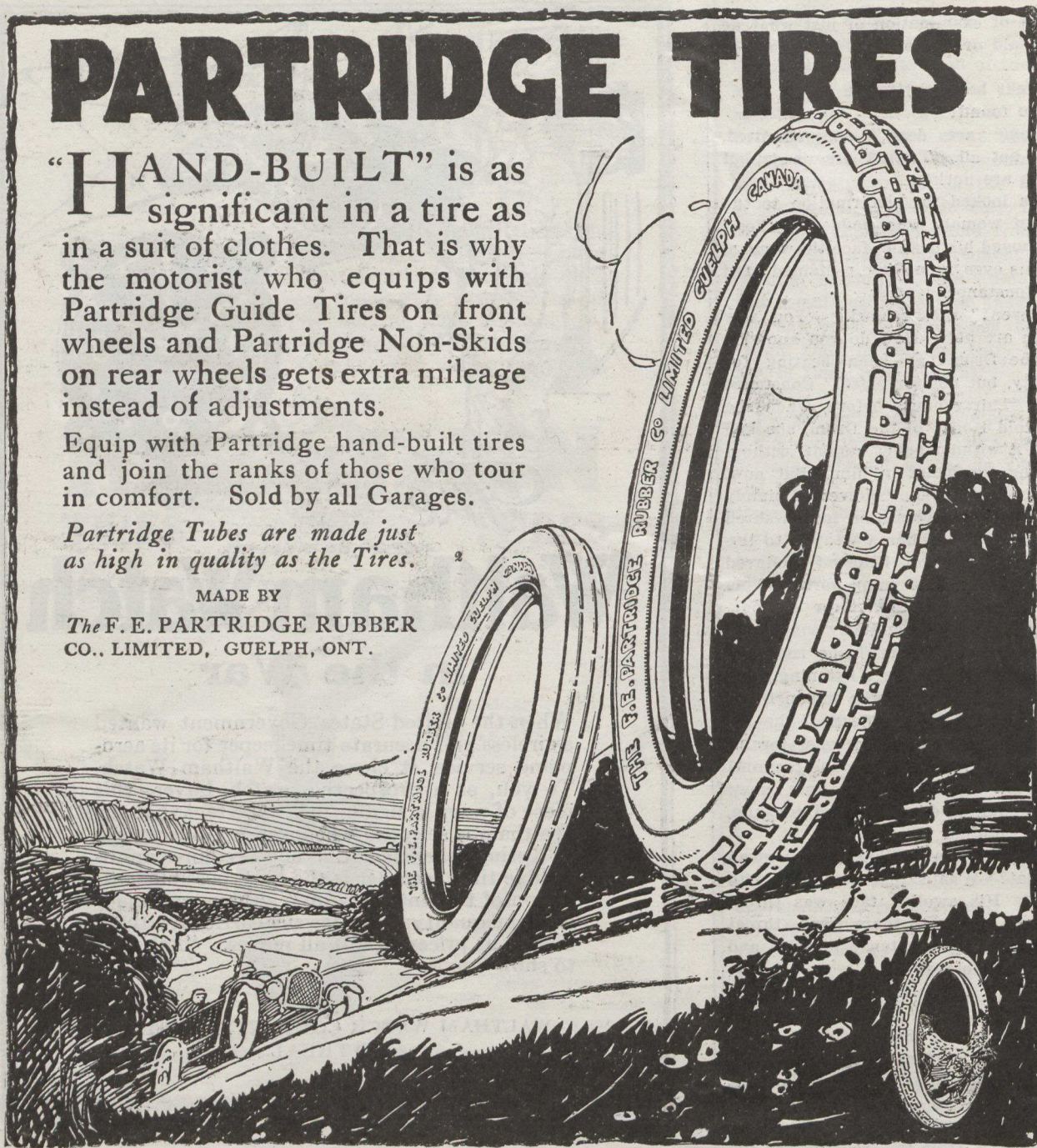
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but the closing of the door did not muffle them again. "Twelve," Constance counted to herself. The beats had seemed to be quite measured and regular at first; but now Constance knew that this was only roughly true; they beat rather in rhythm than at regular intervals. Two came close together and there was a longer wait before the next; then three sounded before the measure—a wild, leaping rhythm. She recalled having heard that the strangeness of Indian music to civilized ears was its time; the drums beat and rattles sounded in a different time from the song which they accompanied; there were even, in some dances, three different times contending for supremacy. Now this seemed reproduced in the strange, irregular sounding of the Drum; she could not count with certainty those beats. "Twenty—twenty-one—twenty-two!" Constance caught breath and waited for the next beat; the time of the interval between the measures of the rhythm passed, and still only the whistle of the wind and the undertone of water sounded. The Drum had beaten its roll and, for the moment, was done.

"Now it begins again," the woman whispered. "Always it waits and then it begins over."

CONSTANCE let go her breath; the next beat then would not mean another death. Twenty-two, had been her count, as nearly as she could count at all; the reckoning agreed with what the woman had heard. Two had died, then, since the Drum last had beat, when its roll was twenty. Two more than before; that meant five were left! Yet Constance, while she was appreciating this, strained forward, staring at Henry; she could not be certain, in the flickering shadows of the cabin, of what she was seeing in him; still less, in the sudden stoppage of heart and breathing that it brought, could she find coherent answer to its meaning. But still it turned her weak, then spurred her with a vague and terrible impulse.

The Indian woman lifted the lamp chimney waveringly and scratched a match and, with unsteady hands, lighted the wick; Constance caught up her woolen hood from the table and put it on. Her action seemed to call Henry to himself.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded.

"I'm going out."

He moved between her and the door. "Not alone, you're not!" His heavy voice had a deep tone of menace in it; he seemed to consider and decide something about her. "There's a farmhouse about a mile back; I'm going to take you over there and leave you with those people."

"I will not go there!"

He swore. "I'll carry you then!"

She shrank back from him as he lurched toward her with hands outstretched to seize her; he followed her, and she avoided him again; if his guilt and terror had given her mental ascendancy over him, his physical strength could still force her to his will and, realizing the impossibility of evading him or overcoming him, she stopped.

"Not that!" she cried. "Don't touch me!"

"Come with me then!" he commanded; and he went to the door and laid his snowshoes on the snow and stepped into them, stooping and tightening the straps; he stood by while she put on hers. He did not attempt



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